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## WHEN ROBERT SWORE OFF

By ERNEST JARROLD

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"LOOK at it, Mabel—how it glitters, as if a mass of melted jewels! I toast you in some of the most incomparable liquid joy that was ever imprisoned in staves of oak. Sweetheart, your health!"

Mabel Brentwood inclined her stately head and raised a glass of lemonade as she sat opposite to Robert Mumford, her affianced husband, in her mother's drawing room on New Year's eve.

"I am sorry I cannot join you in drinking whisky, Robert, but you know my horror of alcohol. My father was a three bottle man, and he died of gout, my uncle shot a dear friend while under the influence of the 'incomparable liquid joy,' and you have broken veins in your cheeks."

"My lady chooses to be sarcastic," replied Robert. "I hope you are not becoming a fanatic."

"Robert, how can you treat so serious a subject in such a trite manner?" said Mabel earnestly. "There is no moral or physiological defense for the use of alcohol. Physicians use it only as a

fight out on a milk diet, and he sent a telegram to Mabel saying he was laid up with a slight touch of malaria, but would be out in a few days.

When Robert rode up to the Brentwood residence a week later he had lost twenty pounds. He was pale and thin, and he walked with a cane. With a sigh of content he dropped into the easy chair which Mabel rolled out for him. There was no allusion to the bet during the evening, for which Robert was inwardly grateful, but such an atmosphere of appreciation, such tenderness of speech and touch and solicitude, that Robert felt that she was the only woman who understood him, and he flattered himself, man fashion, by thinking that she was worth the fight he was making. And just before a carriage came to take him away he drank a glass of fruit juice which Mabel said was of her own concoction.

Alcohol is a kind of liquid cement which binds men of a bibulous type together, and now that the cohesive element was lacking Robert did not feel easy with his old associates. Besides, they resented his desertion as an implied reflection on their own habits. Consequently Robert spent nearly all his evenings in the society of his sweetheart. And invariably, after returning from the concert or theater, Mabel would ask him to take a parting glass of some new drink which she had discovered. Now it was an orange phosphate and again a glass of raspberry vinegar or spiced lemonade until Robert began to believe that there was no end to the kinds of temperance fluids in her closets.

"It looks as if you were going to win your bet, Robert," said Mabel one evening when only two hours intervened between the limit of the thirty days.

"Oh, yes," replied Robert with easy assurance. "It was a foregone conclusion."

"I suppose you will never touch liquor again?" she said wistfully.

"Oh, I don't know about that, Mabel. I shall probably take a glass of liquor now and then when I feel like it. Of course I shall always respect your prejudices."

"Prejudice is sometimes another name for truth, Robert," said Mabel.

At 10 o'clock Robert arose from his seat and took a flask of whisky from his pocket. He poured an inch and one-half of the amber fluid into a lemonade tumbler which stood upon the table. Raising the glass aloft, he said in the words of Ingersoll:

"Mabel, I toast you in some of the most wonderful whisky that ever drove the skeleton from the feast or painted landscapes in the brains of men. In it you will find the sunshine and the shadow that chase each other over the billow fields, the carol of the lark, the breath of June and autumn's glad content. Your health, sweetheart!"

Robert raised the glass to his lips, but as the odor of the liquor reached his nostrils a look of supreme disgust and repulsion overspread his face. He put the glass back on the table. Mabel watched him with fascinated interest. Once more he raised the glass, and again his face was convulsed with aversion. He threw the liquor into the fire, and Mabel burst into tears. From



"I'll TAKE YOUR BET, SWEETHEART."

horseman uses a spur. They have tested its terrible reaction. Heart, lungs, kidneys, unite in rejecting it as a deadly enemy. It puts a premium on murder, inspires thievery and makes strong men strike defenseless women."

Here Mabel stopped, overcome with emotion.

"Why, my dear girl, I did not know that you took the matter so seriously. What has stimulated your interest in the subject so remarkably?"

Mabel arose and walked to his side. She ran her slender fingers through his bronze curls; then she leaned over and kissed him on the forehead.

"You, Robert, are responsible. I have watched you since you have been coming here to visit me lately. Why, you drank a quart of claret at dinner this evening, and you have visited the sideboard six times since dinner tonight."

Robert sat erect in his chair and shook off the caressing fingers. "I did not know that I was alcoholically under surveillance," he said coldly.

"That's the way with a man," replied Mabel sorrowfully. "Tell him the truth and he always meets it with brutality. Now, Mr. Gunpowder," she continued, seating herself on the arm of his chair and putting her arm around his neck, "I'm not going to quarrel with you, but I'm willing to bet you a box of bonbons against a pair of gloves that you cannot give up drinking for one month."

"I'll take your bet, sweetheart," said Robert, mollified by the caress, "just to show you that I'm not the confirmed sot you evidently think me. Drinking is merely a habit which, perhaps, I have encouraged a little, but it won't cause me the least annoyance to give it up for a month to please you."

For many years he had been a consistent drinking man. In summer he drank alcohol in some of its favorite disguises to make him cool and in winter to warm him up. Every meal was anticipated by a cocktail to give him an appetite. In fact, brandy or whisky was a panacea for every ill. Alcohol had been the crutch upon which he had leaned for so long a time that it had become a necessity. And now that he had thrown the crutch away he began to realize the terrible contract he had undertaken.

New Year's day he spent at his club, where the holiday was celebrated in the traditional fashion, with steaming punches and all the delicious concoctions so dear to his palate. Every nerve in his tortured body whimpered for its accustomed stimulus. And the fight had only just begun! He remembered with self contempt that all his torture was caused by the whim of a woman. And he was to endure this torture for thirty days! He could not do it, he thought. Then it began to dawn upon him that Mabel was right; that he really was the refined drunkard she had hinted at. And with this thought the mirth and jollity of the club became unbearable to him, and he donned his coat and rushed out into the night, where the physical action relieved him somewhat.

The next day Robert was ill—nervous prostration and heart failure, the doctor called it. All he needed was a little brandy. Robert said no, he would



HE PUT THE GLASS BACK ON THE TABLE.

the shelter of his comforting arms, a few minutes later, she said:

"And now that you have made such a gallant fight and won you will give up drinking liquor entirely, won't you, Robert?"

"Yes, my love, if it will please you so much," replied Robert.

As the lingering echo of her lover's footsteps died away in the street Mabel took from her pocketbook an advertisement which stated that Dr. Esculapian Galen's sovereign remedy for the alcohol habit could be placed secretly in the tea or coffee of a husband or sweetheart and that he would then be cured of the vice.

"I wonder whether Dr. Galen's sovereign remedy or Robert's powerful will is responsible for his reformation," Mabel soliloquized.

And her face assumed that look of quiet exultation which the faces of all good women wear when their little heels have crushed the head of a serpent.

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